

A Day of Celebration: Reflections of the Past, Celebrating the Present and Embracing the Future

By: Zelda Nash, Ph.D. and Myla Lampkin, L.C.S.W.

On April 14, 2016, the Los Angeles County Department of Probation and LA County Board Supervisor Don Knabe, Fourth District, met with Human Trafficking Survivors, various county departments and a host of community and collaborative agencies, including Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH), LA District Attorney, Law Enforcement–Human Trafficking Task Force, Juvenile Court Health Services, LA County Department of Public Health, the Department of Children and Family Services, Children’s Law Center, and Saving Innocence to reflect on the past, celebrate the present and embrace the future as we fight to end child sex trafficking. Supervisor Don Knabe explained how “Los Angeles County [is] on the Map,” and summarized the evolution (and progress made) during the past five years in eradicating child sex trafficking in L.A. County.

Noteworthy accomplishments in L.A. County include:

- The launch of the Child Trafficking Unit, under the administration of Michelle Guymon, Los Angeles County Department of Probation Director (2011);
- The launch of Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Court, dedicated to hearing cases involving CSEC youth in the delinquency system (2012);
- The training of thousands of County employees on the identification of risk factors and warning signs of CSEC.
- The recent launch of the (CSEC) court in dependency (2015).

In addition, the First Responder Protocol (piloted 2014 in the Compton and Long Beach areas), is a coordinated response to serve CSEC from identification through the first 72 hours of contact. It aims to identify and respond to CSEC youth expeditiously using both a victim-centered and strengths-based approach. The protocol is expected to expand countywide this year.

LACDMH is making great strides in combating sex trafficking and in addressing the mental health needs of sexually exploited children and youth. LACDMH continues to participate in countywide initiatives and efforts with agency and community partners and will continue providing CSEC awareness and clinical trainings to mental health

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April 28, 2016

providers in all service areas. To date, the department has trained over 800 mental health providers.

The day of celebration was filled with love and collaboration and it could be felt throughout the day—by the smiles, laughter and joy in the room, and by the way individuals spoke about the event throughout the day. The camaraderie between agency partners and their commitment to help eradicate child sex trafficking was undoubtedly felt by all. The tone was set in the morning with a poetry reading from a CSEC survivor and a CSEC survivor's panel, moderated by Nola Brantley, (CSEC) training expert and advocate. The celebration continued in the afternoon with an award ceremony where “CSEC Champions in the Field” were recognized for their efforts and initiatives. Among the awardees were two of our very own, Erica Reynoso, Ph.D., L.C.S.W. and Myla Lampkin, L.C.S.W., from the LACDMH Transition Age Youth System of Care Bureau. They were recognized for their dedicated service to our CSEC youth. The day concluded with a performing arts dedication to CSEC survivors, a poetry reading, and a “CSEC Champions in the Field” interagency panel discussion on how CSEC is being addressed within their respective departments.

Supervisor Knabe said, “The true heroes in the fight are our Probation, DCFS, Mental Health, Health Services, Law Enforcement, community partners and so many others who have united to protect our most vulnerable children. Thank you for all you do to fight for our children. Remember: There is NO SUCH THING as a child prostitute.”